

Claudon's Involved with Fairbury Businesses over 100 years

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The Claudon family was involved with grain elevators, livery stables, banks, and auto dealerships for over 100 years in Fairbury. The story of the Claudon family began with the birth of Nicholas Claudon in France in 1800. In that era, Napoleon ruled France from 1804 until 1815. Family lore recounts that Nicholas was forced into military service and had to guard prisoners of Napoleon's army as a young man.

In 1836, Nicholas married Barbara Baechler in France. Nicholas was 36, and Barbara was 22 when they married. They had five sons and three daughters in France. Nicholas sold Percheron large draft horses to American farmers. John Virgin, of Fairbury, was one of the largest American importers of Percheron horses from France.

In 1858, the first of the Claudon children emigrated from France to America. Joseph Claudon (1840-1898) settled in Waldo Township in Livingston County. Joseph was a farmer. He and his wife had eight children.

The second Claudon child to emigrate to America was Christian Claudon (1837-1892) in 1858. He eventually settled in Yates Township west of Fairbury. Christian married Ann Rupp, and they had four children.

The first daughter of Nicholas and Barbara Claudon to emigrate to America was Mary Claudon (1844-1897) in 1866. She married Daniel R. King, and they farmed two miles south of Flanagan. They had no children.

In 1867, the fourth Claudon child to emigrate to Fairbury was Andrew Baechler Claudon. He emigrated to Chenoa in 1867 and then to Fairbury in 1869. Andrew ran the Fairbury grain elevator with his brother Nicholas Jr. and owned the Claudon State Bank in Fairbury. A. B. Claudon married Mary 'Mollie' Alice McDowell, and they had five children.

Peter Pierre Claudon (1852-1913) emigrated to Livingston County in 1871. Peter married Catherine "Kate" Vercler, and they had two children. After Catherine died in 1881, Peter married Magdalena "Lena" Engle, and they had four children.

Nicholas B. Claudon, Jr. (1855-1915) emigrated to Chenoa in 1873. Nicholas initially worked on the Flanagan farm of his brother-in-law, Dan King. He then became a partner in the Danvers mercantile business of Stuckey & Claudon. Nicholas then established the firm of Claudon Brothers in Fairbury, which was a grain elevator business. Nicholas married Mary Ann Schirtz, and they had two children.

Family lore is that Nicholas Claudon Sr. did not believe in forced military conscription. Consequently, he sent each of his five sons to America when they came of age. The five sons were between the ages of 18 and 22 when they emigrated to America. In 1878, Barbara Claudon died in France at the age of 63.

In 1889, Joseph Claudon returned to France to see childhood friends and his aging father. Nicholas Claudon Sr. decided to emigrate to America at the age of 89. He lived with his daughter, Mary King when he arrived in America in Flanagan. His grandchildren were very impressed that he never drank anything but wine the whole time he was in America.

Barbara Claudon married Christian Sommer in France. He was a miller of grain, and they had five children. In 1891, the family emigrated to Bellflower Township. The family finally settled in Pontiac.

In 1893, Nicholas Claudon Sr. died at his daughter's home in Flanagan. He was 93 years old and was buried in Waldo Township Cemetery.

Mary Claudon and Daniel King had no children. They were members of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Flanagan. In 1896, they decided to donate their 100-acre farm for an orphan's home. This facility became the Salem Children's Home.

In 1900, Nelson Jay Claudon, "Jay" Claudon, son of A.B. Claudon, graduated from Fairbury township high school. He married Marie Edith Schule, and they had two children. Jay first worked at the Claudon livery stable. This business was located at the southeast corner of Fourth and Maple Streets, where Ace Hardware is now located. Jay Claudon then started the Claudon Motor Mart auto dealer. The dealership first sold Ford autos and then switched to Chrysler cars. Their garage was on the north side of Locust Street, just to the east of Fairbury Auto at the northeast corner of Locust and First Streets.

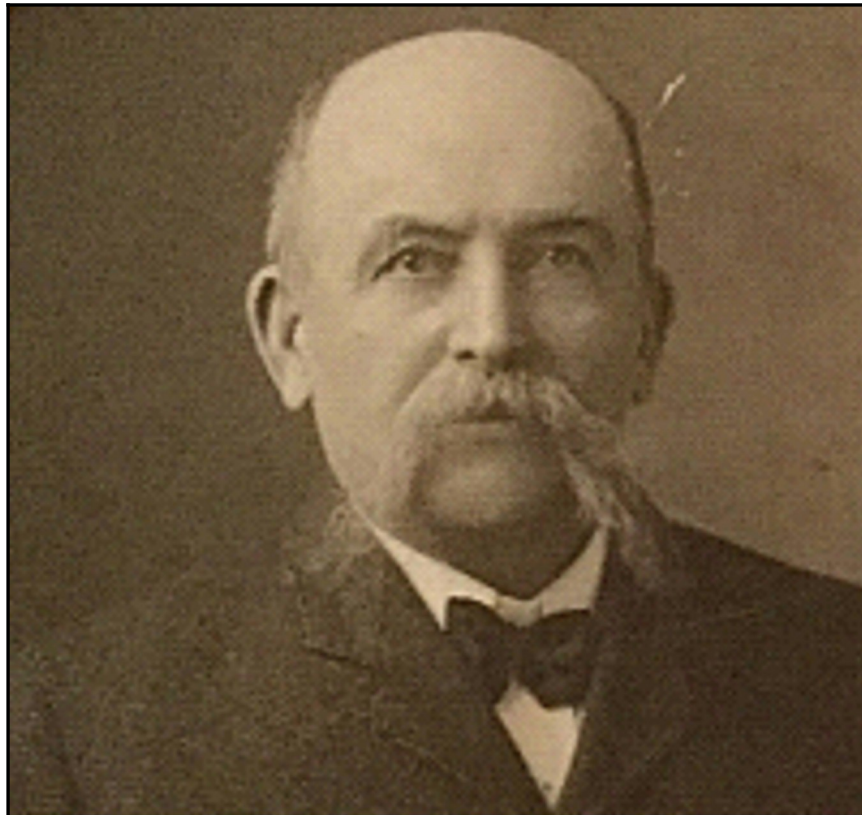
In 1927, the citizens of Fairbury were shocked to learn the Claudon Bank had failed. This story started with the mysterious poisoning of A. B. Claudon Jr. He was the son of the bank founder and the Cashier. The public got so nervous about this strange illness that the board ordered an audit by state bank examiners. The bank Cashier died, and the auditors found significant problems with the bank.

Another son of the bank founder was charged with accepting deposits after the bank was closed. A subsequent trial exonerated this son. The founder of this bank, A. B. Claudon, fled Fairbury fearing he would be arrested. After a four-year nationwide search, he was found and arrested in St. Louis in 1931. He apparently served no prison time because he died at his son's home in Fairbury in 1932. Depositors eventually received 45 percent of their money back.

In 1938, Nelson Jay Claudon Jr. "Jim" Claudon finished high school. He first worked for Hicksgas. Jim then served in WWII in the Pacific Theater. Jim Claudon received the Bronze Battle Star. After the war ended, Jim sold cars with his father at Claudon Motor Mart. Jim took over as owner of the business when his father retired.

In 1964, Nelson Jay Claudon Sr. died at the age of 81. He was interred in the mausoleum at Graceland Cemetery. In 2013, Nelson Jay Claudon Jr. died at the age of 92. He was buried at St. John's Catholic Cemetery north of Fairbury.

For over 100 years, the Claudon family was involved with various Fairbury businesses. These firms included a grain elevator, a bank, a livery stable, and a car dealership. Except for the failure of the Claudon Bank, all the other businesses were successful enterprises.



A. B. Claudon. He was captured after a four-year national manhunt for the failure of the Claudon Bank.